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Arts centre facelift OK'd

PROJECT

Concert hall's new addition includes Elgin entrance

Michael Woods
Metro | Ottawa

A major facelift of the National Arts Centre got a step closer to reality on Wednesday when the National Capital Commission's board of directors approved the project.

The decision paves the way for construction to begin on the iconic concert hall's new addition, which will include a striking new entrance on Elgin Street.

"We're really pleased that the NCC has given its confirmation that we can get going," NAC director of communications Rosemary Thompson said. "It means we can build."

With the grand opening of the new NAC scheduled for Canada Day 2017, crews have an 18-month windows to complete the project. Thompson said builders PCL and architects Diamond Schmitt have said that's a makeable deadline.

In December 2014, the Conservative government pledged $110.5 million toward the NAC's architectural renewal.

On Wednesday, NCC board members effusively praised the design of the new addition, which will also include new performance and public spaces.

"I'm really pleased to see the building will finally have a front door on the street that it should have had on Day 1," said board member Norman Hotson, an architect. "This will fix what I consider to be a rather ugly building."

Another board member said the new exterior will turn the NAC into "a shining sapphire right in the downtown area."

Some work has already begun, but Thompson said people will start seeing evidence of construction in the next couple of weeks.

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Welcome to the Hill

Michael Woods
Metro | Ottawa

One of the most significant additions to the Parliamentary precinct in the past century got the green light from the National Capital Commission's board of directors on Wednesday.

The new Visitors Welcome Centre on Parliament Hill will be a four-storey underground facility, providing security screening and an inviting new entrance for tourists checking out the Hill.

The NCC approved Phase 1 of the project at its board meeting.

Scheduled to be finished in December 2017, it will provide a new public entrance to the West Block building while Centre Block is under construction starting in 2018.

Subsequent phases will see the welcome centre expand to the east, eventually servicing all three Parliament buildings.

Some NCC board members expressed concern about the location of the entrance on the west side of the Hill, given most pedestrians approach from the southeast.

However, NCC chief executive Mark Kristmanson noted that the focus of Parliament will shift to the West Block during the next decade or so, with the House of Commons scheduled to sit there during the Centre Block construction project.

1 Making a great first impression — A rendering of what the new entrance of the Visitors Welcome Centre on Parliament Hill is expected to look like to approaching visitors

2 A welcoming inside space — An artist's vision of the main lobby of the welcome centre

3 The view from above — A bird's-eye rendering of the below-street-level entrance to the new visitor welcome centre

4 Spacious lower floor — An open and airy gathering area on a lower level of the welcome centre

5 Changing levels — After entering the facility, visitors will have easy access to the downstairs gathering area

ALL IMAGES COURTESY THE NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

TECH

Apple to set up in Kanata: Sources

David Sali
Ottawa Business Journal

Apple has leased space at a Kanata office complex in preparation for setting up a facility in the National Capital Region, several sources have confirmed.

Although the California-based tech giant has yet to publicly announce it is establishing a presence in Ottawa, sources say they believe a 22,100-square-foot suite at 411 Legget Dr. in the Kanata Research Park will be devoted to research and development.

The space is located in the G. Best Building, which is owned by KRP Properties. The building's main tenant is now DragonWave.

KRP describes the property as a "full-floor office suite." The building's director of leasing did not respond to a request for comment.

The world's largest technology company by total assets and its second-largest mobile phone manufacturer, Apple generated revenues of more than $233 billion US in 2015.

The company has been boosting its R&D spending in recent years, investing more than $8 billion in research and development in fiscal 2015 alone — a 34 per cent increase over the previous year. In the past 12 months, Apple has opened or planned new research facilities in Cambridge, England, and Yokohama, Japan.

PRIVACY

Myths halting reports of abuse

Recent inquests into the deaths of Ontario children have failed to shake persistent myths that prevent many people from reporting concerns about kids to child welfare authorities, two provincial offices said Wednesday.

Teachers, police officers and other professionals who deal with children often remain reluctant to share information with children's aid societies due to common misconceptions about privacy, according to the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario and the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

Though they may mean well, their hesitation is misguided and may put children at risk, the officials said.

"Professionals who are working with children not only may share information that may help protect that child, but in some cases, have a duty to share that information," said the privacy commissioner, Brian Beamish.

The need for greater communication between those who work with and care for children has been at the forefront of several coroner's inquests into the death of children.

Recommendations issued in the Jeffrey Baldwin inquest suggested a public awareness campaign about people's duty to report concerns about child abuse or neglect, and reminders to professionals about their legal duties.

Jeffrey Baldwin was a healthy baby when he and his siblings were placed in the care of their grandparents, but over the next few years the boy fell multiple times through society's safety nets and starved to death.

"There's been some impetus from that inquest, after some pushing, to help people understand more the importance about the duty to report and how serious an obligation it is," said Irwin Elman, Ontario's advocate for children and youth. However, he said, "I think more can be done."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

EDUCATION

A pamphlet released Wednesday aims to clear up misunderstandings by laying out people's responsibilities.

The 15-page document will be distributed to teachers, healthcare practitioners, law enforcement and children's-aid societies through professional associations.

Lagging loonie could help film, tourism industries

CURRENCY

Americans may be enticed by offerings of nation's capital

Lucy Scholey
Metro | Ottawa

There may be an upside to the loonie being down — at least when it comes to Ottawa's local film and tourism industry.

The Canadian dollar's drop may entice American producers and tourists to take a closer look at the nation's capital.

Ottawa is no movie production powerhouse compared to Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. But, because production is already high in those cities, smaller cities like Ottawa should see a boost in filmmaking, according to Invest Ottawa Film Commissioner Bruce Harvey.

"Local producer Zed Filmworks was already anticipating a very busy year. The lower loonie should result in near capacity levels for them in 2016," he said in an email.

But local production companies filming for Canadian viewers, like the CBC, might take a hit this year, he said, especially if they are purchasing unique props or hiring American actors.

> **Not that it's a tit-for-tat comparison, but ... it's more affordable to do a Canadian holiday than a U.S. holiday, for Canadians.** Jantine Van Kregten

Don't expect a deluge of American film sets popping up in the capital. Rather than send crews to Canada this year, bigger production companies may take out Canadian currency now for future projects.

Ottawa Tourism is not expecting a flood of American tourists either, but a "modest" increase, said communications director Jantine Van Kregten. By the end of September last year, the number of New York visitors who stayed in Ottawa-area hotels rose by 4.4 per cent compared to the previous year. Overnight hotel stays for other U.S. travellers increased 7.5 per cent, according to Ottawa Tourism figures.

Canadian snowbirds upset about a more expensive winter down south may also opt for a staycation, which is what Ottawa Tourism is hoping for.

The Canadian loonie's value dropped by a third of a cent on Wednesday, down to just below 69 cents to the U.S. dollar. Macquarie Group Ltd. Forecaster David Doyle is not optimistic our dollar will bounce back anytime soon, but plummet to a record-low of 59 cents, as reported in Bloomberg.

LIGHTS OUT DOWNTOWN BIDS ADIEU TO HOLIDAYS The lights are coming down just as Visa bills are showing up — a sure sign the holidays are truly over. Rick Belford with Roy's Lighting was taking down "thousands" of lights across downtown Ottawa on Wednesday, a process he said will take more than a month. However, lights will stay on at Confederation Square and Jacques Cartier Park until Winterlude wraps up on Family Day weekend. EMMA JACKSON/METRO

VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM

Memorial officially moving to new site

Michael Woods
Metro | Ottawa

It's official: the memorial to the victims of communism is on the move.

The National Capital Commission's board of directors voted Wednesday to rescind the approvals it had previously granted to erect the memorial on a controversial site southwest of the Supreme Court.

"This has been a very divisive and difficult file for everyone involved," NCC chief executive Mark Kristmanson said before the vote.

The site garnered opposition from the mayor, city council and various community groups.

The NCC said the department intends to seek permission for the memorial to be located on the Garden of the Provinces and Territories. The board will be asked to approve the location at its April meeting.

HOUSING

Condo proposals looming

It's double the reason to love — or hate — condos in Ottawa. A pair of condo development proposals, one downtown and one in Lowertown, will be up for debate at a city planning committee next week.

Morguard Corp. wants to build a 23-storey condo and 27-storey hotel on the corner of Sparks and Bay streets. The other proposal is for two 25-storey buildings with commercial space on Chapel Street. METRO STAFF

CITY COUNCIL

Crumbling cottage, school up for talks

The fate of two derelict Lowertown buildings will once again go before city councillors next week.

All that remains of the 112-year-old Our Lady's School — a former all-girls Roman Catholic institution on Cumberland and Murray streets — is two walls. Owner Claude Lauzon Group wants to work those walls into a new four-storey apartment building. But to do so, they are requesting the demolition of a neighbouring 1860s-era women's "workers' cottage" at 281-283 Cumberland St.

Late last year, the city's built heritage subcommittee voted against the demolition and apartment plan, which went against staff recommendation.

The planning and growth management department said it "regrets" the loss of the cottage but that it is necessary for the "reanimation" of the site across from St. Brigid's Centre for the Arts. LUCY SCHOLEY/METRO

Challenge features Ottawa designers

HOME SHOW

Local industry people asked to refurbish doors to auction

Haley Ritchie
Metro | Ottawa

Ottawa residents checking out the homes and remodelling show this weekend will have the chance to bid on some very unique furniture "upcycled" from old doors.

Local designers, artists and media personalities were tasked with taking the former doors and refurbishing them for the "ultimate upcycle challenge."

The resulting projects include a mosaic, shelf, jewelry hangers and chalkboard that will be sold at auction.

> **It removes the impersonal part of buying things that comes from making purchases over the Internet or through catalogues these days.**
> Robert Johnstone

"The idea is each of them take it and give it their own design," said show manager Robert Johnstone.

Funds raised through the auction will go towards Habitat for Humanity.

Johnstone said the other parts of the show should appeal to both homeowners and professionals who want to see new products and be inspired by new trends.

Vendors are "building" their booths, many of which involve model rooms. Johnstone said it is set up like a "super Ikea" where visitors can see new renovation trends for themselves.

"We want to create the face-to-face interaction at the show," he said.

"It removes the impersonal part of buying things that comes from making purchases over the Internet or through catalogues these days."

Popular television host Bryan Baeumler will be giving a talk on Saturday, but the entire show runs four days from Thursday to Sunday at the EY Centre near the Ottawa airport.

Celtic rock group CelKilt and fusion band Delhi 2 Dublin will be playing the event. COURTESY JÉRÔME VACHERON

ST. PATRICK'S DAY

Brewery, Irish Society of Ottawa team up

Fans of green beer take note — Beau's Brewery and the Irish Society of Ottawa are teaming up this year for an entirely new St. Patrick's Day event.

"We know how to throw a party so (the Irish Society) came to us to bring some new life to it," said event producer Josh Gottlieb. "We have great beer, great food, great music and those are the things we try to bring to our events."

Beau's is promising a dozen of their beers on tap and both traditional and new Irish music and dance at the March 19 bash at Aberdeen Pavilion at Lansdowne Park.

"Being able to hit the traditional element and more contemporary traditions are going to make it a new experience," said Gottlieb.

"It'll be kind of fun to come out to an event space instead of just go to the pub. Some people really love the pub atmosphere, but others really love the party atmosphere," he said.

Beau's chef Bruce Wood will prepare Irish-inspired foods along with beer pairings.

Musical entertainment includes Delhi 2 Dublin, a band that incorporates Celtic fiddle with Bhangra hip hop. Celtic rock group CelKilt will also play the event between traditional music and dance.

Beau's also hosts the annual Oktoberfest in Vankleek Hill but communications director Jen Beauchesne said she's excited to bring a similar event into the city.

"It's wonderful to have everybody come visit us in Vankleek Hill, but this is the first opportunity we've had to bring Oktoberfest fun up to Ottawa," she said.

Tickets for Beau's St. Patrick's Party cost $29 for adults and will go on sale Thursday at StPatricksParty.ca. HALEY RITCHIE/METRO

IN BRIEF

New festival coming to the west end

Westboro Village BIA has announced it will partner with Knock on Wood and Aboriginal Experience to bring a new festival to Richmond Road this spring.

The new, unnamed festival will take place June 10 to 12 and incorporate Westboro's "urban outdoor lifestyle," according to a news release. The festival is set to feature musical acts on multiple stages, buskers, craft beer, culinary tastings, gardening demos, yoga and art exhibits. HALEY RITCHIE/METRO

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Five different potential designs for streetside spots were created by Carleton architecture students. CONTRIBUTED

Ideas released for roadside parklets

VANIER

Models for the stylish spaces found in T.O., San Francisco

Haley Ritchie
Metro | Ottawa

Tiny, funky parks and patios the size of parking spaces could soon appear in Ottawa streets — and the Quartier Vanier BIA wants them first.

"It's a public space that contains elements of seating, shading, bike parking, games tables — it's a reimagined parking space," said Jamie Kwong, executive director of the BIA.

"Rather than one car being there, multiple people can use that space," she said.

Residents in Vanier can vote for their preferred parklet design on Thursday at 135 Barrette St., and the BIA will then submit the application to the city.

Council approved the idea in September after looking at successful models in Seattle, San Francisco and Toronto.

The city is accepting applications until Feb. 15. If all goes well, Kwong hopes construction on a Vanier parklet would begin in April.

The five concept designs came from a partnership with Carleton University's Azrieli architecture school.

The mock-ups show people relaxing and talking on colourful structures that incorporate seating. Kwong said the public spaces could also host artists and events.

"Each of the designs have their own strength and uniqueness," said Kwong. "The community is asked to vote on which one they'd like to see."

The application process is complex and has many strict requirements. Parklets cannot be placed in a lane that carries moving traffic; they can only be put in dedicated parking lanes.

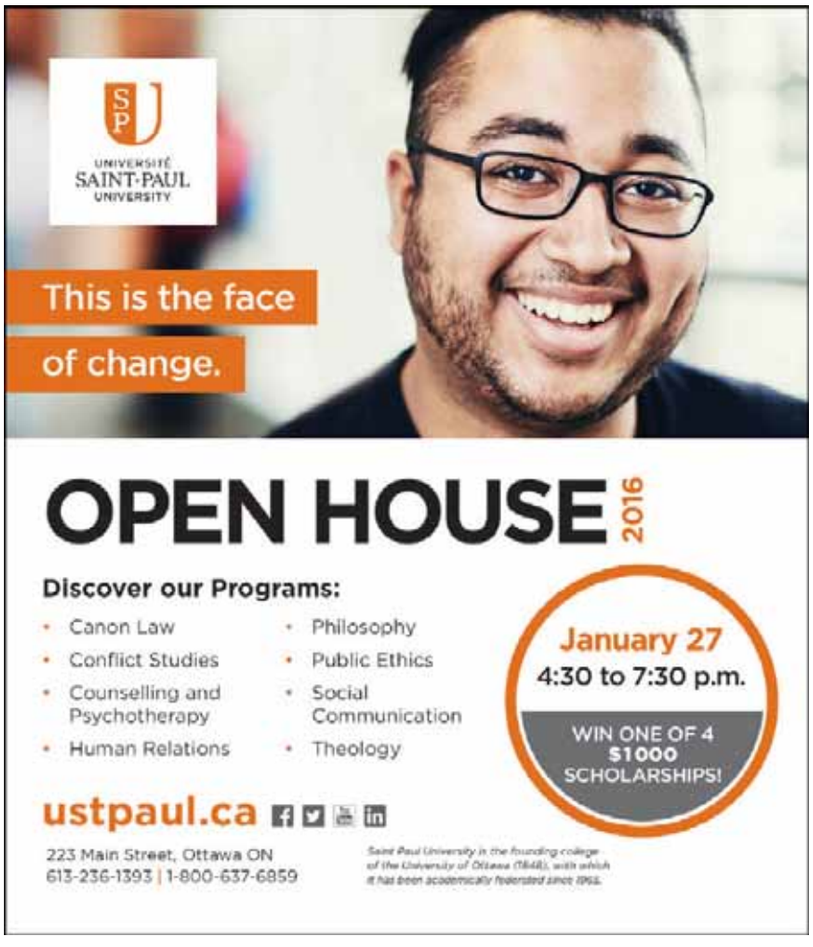
Parklets also can't be located too close to existing restaurant patios but require proximity to walking traffic and businesses. They also need to be able to be removed and stored during winter months.

Kwong said people shouldn't be surprised something so trendy is coming to Vanier first.

"We've been the underdog of the city," she said. "People subscribe to those easy misconceptions, but tomorrow we'll be blasting that away. We have so many great attributes in Vanier."

$20,000

Amount of money the BIA is dedicating toward the project, which will allow one parklet to be built on Beechwood Avenue in front of Arturo's Italian restaurant.



CITY PLANNING

Study envisions bustling, 'shared' Armstrong Street

Emma Jackson
Metro | Ottawa

Picture Armstrong Street in Hintonburg: its narrow sidewalks, empty lots, crumbling buildings and sporadic infill.

Now imagine, instead, Armstrong remade into a bustling avenue, where cyclists, pedestrians and drivers vie for room amid planters and benches, and small businesses thrive in an affordable residential community.

Four McGill University students have done just that.

The urban-planning graduate students worked with the Wellington West BIA and Kitchissippi Coun. Jeff Leiper last fall to assess Armstrong's strengths and weaknesses and host an open house for residents.

The study comes on the heels of zoning changes the city implemented last year, which rezoned a handful of properties on and around Armstrong to make way for small businesses like pizza joints, cafés and boutiques.

But Leiper convinced the planning committee at the time to hold off on the changes until the community could develop a greater vision for the street.

The new student report is a "conversation starter" in that process, Leiper said.

He still wants to host more public consultations starting in April and plans to bring a complete community vision to the planning committee by September.

This early work makes three recommendations.

First, that the city should turn Armstrong into a "shared street" that would bury hydro lines, prioritize sustainable transportation and reduce speeds to 10 km/h for everyone. The European concept nixes sidewalks and cycle tracks in favour of a transit free-for-all among benches, trees and planters.

"You would have to go slowly because there are so many things on the road," said study co-author Joshua Adams.

That would create foot traffic to support the study's other recommendations, which include expanding small-scale commercial allowances if the initial rezoning goes well and offering a rent subsidy for startups through the BIA.

BIA director Zach Dayler said his group is "pursuing that idea of incubator space," but it remains to be seen if the study's recommendations jibe with community sentiment. "Obviously they need to be consulted way more widely," Dayler said.

+ PARKING

The study also encourages developing on the many empty lots along the strip. If developers agreed to bury parking, they could get an extra storey above ground, the authors suggested.

> **You would have to go slowly because there are so many things on the road.**
> Joshua Adams

Carlton University grads Boris Misljencevic, left, and Nishant Bhasin have developed a file-sharing app called Episync.
CONTRIBUTED

TECHNOLOGY

App can transfer files minus wires, Internet

When Nishant Bhasin and Boris Misljencevic were in their fourth year of university, they wanted to figure out a way to speed up the process of transferring files from one device to another without the use of cables.

The two recent Carleton University graduates decided to develop an app — called Episync — that would do just that.

"We decided that it's a hassle to bring wires everywhere," Bhasin said.

"If you own a smartphone but want to transfer files, you have to plug into a computer and use iTunes."

The duo worked on the app through a project in their software engineering program at school. They have already launched an Android version of the app and are working on a prototype for iPhones they are hoping to have ready by late March.

The app differs from other file-transferring programs such as Dropbox, as the user can use Episync without even connecting to the Internet, as long as both devices are connected to the same router or network.

The app simplifies and speeds up a process that can sometimes be cumbersome, with the ability to sync 10 gigabytes worth of files in just 10 minutes, Bhasin said.

The two tech developers are looking at how they can have the app connect to Google Drive and iCloud so that users can access all their files.

The two are now looking to get some funding to get the app off the ground and are looking into getting some office space from Invest Ottawa.

Bhasin will talk about developing the app at the PC Users' Group's monthly meeting on Feb. 10.
METROLAND MEDIA

IN BRIEF

Sports-playing kids invited to mouth-guard clinic
Hockey season is in full swing, but some kids may have already worn out their mouth guards.

If you're looking for a new one, the Canadian National Institute of Health is teaming up with the Boys and Girls Club for a mouth-guard clinic this weekend.

The event — which takes place this Saturday from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. at the college clinic in the Lincoln Fields Mall — is meant for children who play sports.

Staff, volunteers and the Canadian National Institute of Health's clinical team will be taking impressions and making the mouth guards on site. METRO

Kitchen party in the 'hood

ALBION-HEATHERINGTON

Communal effort gets city, federal funds

It's hoped the city's first community kitchen will bring Albion-Heatherington neighbours together for food, feasting and fun.

The kitchen, which will be built on as an addition to the west side of the Albion-Heatherington Recreation Centre, at 1560 Heatherington Rd., will feature industrial-scale cooking and dishwashing equipment and a space large enough for residents to gather and cook up a storm.

"This is the first community kitchen the city's had," Gloucester-Southgate Coun. Diane Deans said during her recent New Year's Open House at the Greenboro Community Centre. "And it's the perfect neighbourhood for it."

The recreation and community centre, which overlooks Heatherington Park, currently has a small kitchen that isn't big enough for groups or industrial equipment.

Deans, inspired after reading about a community kitchen project in Mississauga, successfully submitted the project proposal for federal funding last year.

As a result, the community or collective kitchen will receive $800,000. Of that, $176,000 is coming from the federal government's Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Program, while the city is contributing $312,000 in strategic initiative funding as well as $312,000 in development charges.

Discussions also inspired conversations about food security and a desire to establish a community garden.
ERIN MCCRACKEN/METROLAND MEDIA

Zellers

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Bass heads create scene

BACKSTAGE PASS

Big DJ parties evidence of a resurrection

Trevor Greenway
Metro | Ottawa

It hasn't taken bass heads long to carve out a little niche scene in Ottawa — about a few months, to be exact.

If you've been paying any attention to the big DJ parties at Ritual, Flybar, Babylon and Plurr over the past few months, you've seen the major headliners swing through our capital city, dropping bass bombs to roaring revellers who are starting to come out in droves to get rinsed.

The resurrection of the bass scene of Ottawa may have been slow at first, but with the likes of Brooklyn-based DJ and producer Bauuer, L.A. bass god NGHTMRE, Miami-based turntablist DJ Craze and New York's trap king Notixx invading the city in the past few months, the 20-something college students have taken notice.

L.A. producers Slander bring a heavy bass sound to Flybar. COURTESY CIRCLE TALENT AGENCY

"The bass scene is doing good; there are a lot of people that are pushing hard right now," says Jordan Michon, a local DJ (Strange Future) and a party promoter with Rude Sound Culture.

"The key element is to not go too far underground. There needs to be a balance of keeping music underground so that people are supporting the up-and-coming scene and, as well, keeping it mainstream enough to turn a lot of the mainstream crowds' heads."

> **There are a lot of people that are pushing hard right now.**
> DJ Jordan Michon

That's where these massive headliners come in, and Thursday night will be no different when L.A. producers Slander (Mad Decent) show up to tear the roof off of Flybar.

Slander alone is enough to draw thousands of college bass fanatics to the bar, already wobbly from the cheap liquor they chugged down in their respective dorm rooms. But for Michon, Rude Sound Culture and Dreammind Entertainment, the company putting on the Slander show, these massive bass nights are about way more than just a flashy headliner. If you look on the bill of these shows, you will always see a healthy dose of local selectors warming up the dance floor. It's part of how you build a local scene from the ground up.

"Ottawa has a huge pool of amazing local talent whose styles directly reflect what's popular in their local scenes," says Michon. "They understand what the crowd wants to hear and the musical journey the promoters want the crowd to be taken on."

Slander brings the beats to Flybar tonight. Tickets are between $20 and $30.

LEARNING

Trent offers indigenous program for teachers

An Ontario university will offer a new program next fall that it hopes will help boost indigenous numbers among teachers.

Cathy Bruce, interim dean of education at Trent University, says the school will offer an indigenous bachelor of education degree program. The new program is partly in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report that called on all levels of government to change policies to repair problems caused by residential schools.

The report also recommended students be taught about the history and current plight of First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

The school is still accepting applications and hopes to have 15 students start in September.

Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ont., offers a similar program that allows grads to teach children up to Grade 6, whereas future Trent graduates will be able to teach through high school. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Ontario Energy Board

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We're No. 2!

SURVEY

Canada ranked world's second-best country

The annual schmooze-fest of the rich, powerful, famous and their courtiers in Davos, Switzerland, has already produced splendid news for Canada: we're No. 2 in a new ranking of the best countries in the world.

Released at the World Economic Forum, the survey rated 60 countries across 24 categories.

Germany was first, Canada second, the United Kingdom third, the United States fourth and Sweden fifth.

The survey was prepared by U.S. News and World Report, the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of business and global brand consultants BAV Consulting.

Canada, the survey said, welcomes immigrants and celebrates diversity, draws some of its national identity from its expansive wilderness, has produced a long list of accomplished writers and artists and is a high-tech industrial society with a high standard of living.

Former prime minister Brian Mulroney will be pleased to see a nod to the trade agreements of the '80s and '90s that the survey said dramatically bolstered trade with the United States.

"While the service sector is Canada's biggest economic driver, the country is a significant exporter of energy, food and minerals," it said. "Canada ranks third in the world in proven oil reserves and is the world's fifth largest oil producer."

Canadian challenges, it said, are "the concerns of indigenous people" and the perennial matter of relations between Quebec and the rest of the country.

"While constitutional guarantees allow the province wide-ranging cultural and linguistic autonomy, movements for complete independence come in waves."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

SWITZERLAND TRUDEAU ADDRESSES RICH AND POWERFUL Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, accompanied by staff members, walks through town as he heads to a bilateral meeting in Davos, Switzerland, on Wednesday. Trudeau is attending the World Economic Forum where political, business and social leaders gather to discuss world agendas. Trudeau's keynote address at the World Economic Forum framed Canada as a safe place to invest amid global economic uncertainty. ANDREW VAUGHAN/THE CANADIAN PRESS

MONTREAL

Factory drawing refugees

When Syrian refugee Garouj Nazarian is asked how he likes working for his boss, the answer comes in choppy English — but the sentiment shines through.

"So much good," he says with a big smile, offering a thumbs-up to emphasize his joy.

Nazarian, who's been in Canada for about a year, has been working for six months at a Montreal plywood factory owned by Levon Afeyan, who fled Lebanon's civil war with his parents and two brothers in 1975.

Nazarian is one of 12 Syrian refugees among 80 employees and Afeyan intends to hire more as Canada opens its borders to thousands of people fleeing the Assad regime and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Essential to feeling Canadian, Afeyan adds, is to start speaking English and, particularly in Quebec, French.

Starting in March, a teacher subsidized by the Quebec government will offer French lessons twice a week for free — inside his factory. THE CANADIAN PRESS

ECONOMY

No threat of Ontario debt crisis: Expert

Amid all of Canada's bleak economic news, there may be a glimmer of hope about Ontario's massive provincial debt.

A new report on the province's fiscal situation to be released Thursday concludes the long-term outlook is less grim than critics have feared thanks largely to historically low interest rates and a growing Ontario economy.

"Despite some concerns about the level of Ontario's debt, the province isn't anywhere close to hitting a debt wall," said Sheila Block, senior economist with the left-leaning Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

39.4%

Ontario's debt-to-GDP ratio in 2014-15. Without changes to accounting rules, it would have been 35.9%.

Block, author of the 20-page study, "No Crisis on the Horizon: Ontario Debt, 1990-2015," noted as Premier Kathleen Wynne's Liberals prepare a spring budget their focus should not be eliminating the deficit by 2017-18.

"The Wynne government was elected with an activist mandate, yet it has always allowed concerns about debt and deficits to hamstring that agenda," the economist wrote, pointing to the "questionable" sale of a majority stake in Hydro One to bankroll transportation infrastructure and the Liberals' reticence toward raising taxes to generate revenue.

To bolster her contention that Ontario's debt — currently about $295 billion — is manageable, Block looked at its ratio to the province's gross domestic product over the past 25 years.

She also factored in that during that time the stranded residual debt of the old Ontario Hydro, and the broader public sector debt from schools boards, colleges and hospitals was also added to the province's tally.

"Part of the debt increase is due to the changes in accounting rules, not a result of profligate public spending (which is, per capita, the lowest in Canada)," Block wrote.

"There is a continued appetite in financial markets for Ontario debt. That means that financial markets expect it will be repaid and that the provincial government is not approaching a debt wall," she added. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

IN BRIEF

Statue frightens bejesus out of concerned citizens

A statue in Hamilton is getting a lot of attention from paramedics as a recent blast of wintry weather has resulted in calls about a homeless person sleeping on a bench. Citizens have been mistaking "Homeless Jesus," a bronze sculpture of Jesus wrapped in a blanket and sleeping on a park bench, for a real person. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Dozens of families affected by no-fly list difficulties

The whirlwind of publicity about six-year-old Syed Adam Ahmed's difficulty at the airport has prompted 21 families with similar stories to contact Khadija Cajee, the boy's mother. Cajee has recently sent a letter to federal cabinet ministers involved in the high-profile issue.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Charity audits persist

The Liberal government says it is winding down a controversial Conservative program of political-activity audits on charities. Twenty-four audits will continue in an effort to address any serious deficiencies.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Islamic militants kill 20 at school

PAKISTAN

Concerns rise over whether police can protect state

Once again, Islamic militants stormed a school in northeastern Pakistan in a deadly attack that lasted for hours. And once again, the blood of students and teachers stained classrooms and hallways, raising questions about whether security forces can protect the country's educational institutions.

At least 20 people were killed and 23 were wounded Wednesday in the assault at Bacha Khan University in Charsadda before the four gunmen were slain and the military declared an end to the siege. Two teachers were among the dead, including a chemistry professor who was praised as a hero for shooting back at the attackers and allowing some students to escape.

The university attack was grimly reminiscent of the December 2014 massacre at an army public school in Peshawar that killed 150, mostly children.

The violence shows how vulnerable schools remain in Pakistan, where extremists have sought to prevent Western-style education, especially for girls. Teenager Malala Yousafzai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize after she was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman in 2012 because of her support for gender equality and education for girls.

Last weekend, several schools were closed after intelligence suggested militants were planning an attack, according to Muhammed Amir Rana, director of the private Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies. A spokesman for the provincial government said the schools were closed as part of a security drill.

After the Peshawar attack, the government promised to set up a joint Intelligence Directorate, but that has not happened yet.

The military is one of the most powerful institutions in Pakistan, as is the intelligence agency, known as the ISI.

"The government is trying to develop a response but is facing capacity issues," Rana said.

The army has been pounding militant hideouts in the tribal areas on the border with Afghanistan since June 2014, disrupting operations for the Pakistani Taliban militants. Because of that campaign, analysts say the extremists have turned to attacking soft targets such as schools. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CONDEMNATION

A breakaway Taliban faction led by Khalifa Umar Mansoor said it had carried out the attack. But a statement emailed to news organizations by Muhammad Khorasani, the spokesman for the Tehrik-e-Taliban, the largest Taliban group, said: "We disown, condemn the attack and term it as un-Islamic." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Relatives of the 2014 Peshawar school victims pray during a candlelight ceremony for the victims of the Bacha Khan University in Peshawar on Wednesday. **It's estimated that 23 people were wounded, in addition to the 20 victims who lost their lives.** AFP/GETTY IMAGES

SCIENCE

Research points to giant 9th planet at solar system's edge

This rendering shows the distant view from Planet 9 back toward the sun. **It's thought to be gaseous, similar to Neptune.** COURTESY CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The solar system may have a ninth planet after all.

This one is 5,000 times bigger than outcast Pluto and billions of miles farther away, say scientists who presented "good evidence" for a long-hypothesized Planet X on Wednesday.

The gas giant is thought to be almost as big as its nearest planetary neighbour Neptune, quite possibly with rings and moons. It's so distant that it would take a mind-blowing 10,000 to 20,000 years to circle the sun.

Planet 9, as the pair of California Institute of Technology researchers calls it, hasn't been spotted yet. They base their prediction on mathematical and computer modeling, and anticipate its discovery via telescope within five years or less.

The two reported their research Wednesday in the Astronomical Journal because they want people to help them look for it.

"We could have stayed quiet and quietly spent the next five years searching the skies ourselves and hoping to find it. But I would rather somebody find it sooner, than me find it later," astronomer Mike Brown, the so-called Pluto killer who helped lead the charge against Pluto's planetary status in 2006. Once Planet 9, Pluto is now officially considered a dwarf planet.

Brown and planetary scientist Konstantin Batygin feel certain about their prediction, which at first seemed unbelievable to even them.

"For the first time in more than 150 years, there's good evidence that the planetary census of the solar system is incomplete," Batygin said. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IN BRIEF

Five planets to be viewable across southern sky: NASA

People talk about the planets aligning, but have you seen real ones do it? If the weather is clear over the coming month, early risers will be able to view Mercury, Venus, Saturn, Mars and Jupiter with the naked eye, across the southern sky. NASA says the phenomenon — visible this week until Feb. 20 — happens every few years when the planets orbit on the same side of the Sun. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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FLINT WATER CRISIS

Reconsider disaster status, Michigan asks Obama

A resident of Flint, Mich., pours canned water into a pot so it can be boiled in preparation for cooking on Tuesday. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder asked U.S. President Barack Obama on Wednesday to reconsider his denial of a federal disaster declaration to address the drinking water crisis in Flint, saying its severity poses an "imminent and long-term threat" to residents.

Obama declared an emergency — qualifying the city for $5 million — but determined it is not a disaster based on the legal requirement that additional relief is for natural events, fires, floods or explosions.

In his appeal letter, Snyder called it a "narrow reading" and likened the crisis to a flood, "given that qualities within the water, over a long term, flood and damaged the city's infrastructure in ways that were not immediately or easily detectable. This disaster is a natural catastrophe in the sense that lead contamination into water is a natural process."

He said the state and city cannot meet all the needs of Flint residents. He again painted a bleak picture of the city and said the "economic injury" from the crisis is significant. Snyder said the disaster will lead to years, potentially decades of health problems and economic losses as well as infrastructure repairs that "neither the city, county or state have the capacity to conduct."

"I'm sorry most of all that I let you down," Snyder, whose administration is engulfed in criticism, said in a statement.

Democrats said Snyder only recently admitted the magnitude of the fiasco, at least three months too late.

"This is the kind of disaster, the kind of failure to deliver basic services that hurts people's trust in government," House Minority Leader Tim Greimel said. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Millennials like being own boss

WORK TRENDS

Many prefer a business to traditional workplace

Priya Dhillon, a 33-year-old with a PhD in molecular biology, has her sights set on something a lot less scientific: to own an A&W franchise.

The concept is closer to becoming a reality for her now that the Canadian burger giant is actively recruiting and helping millennials scoop up new franchises planned for urban locations, starting with Toronto.

Dhillon represents a predominant entrepreneurial trend among Canadian millennials, many of whom say they would rather be self-employed than have a traditional workplace with a boss hovering over them.

Based on a recent poll of 5,800 participants in 10 countries, media agency network ZenithOptimedia found global consumers aged 18 to 34 have a "fundamentally different approach" to achieving happiness compared to previous generations.

While baby boomers in their youth were defined as idealists with a free-spirit vibe, millennials seek to gain much more control over their lives to obtain happiness, it found.

"Most millennials told us they valued the freedom and flexibility of new ways of working. Inspired by their peers, including tech entrepreneurs like (Facebook founder) Mark Zuckerberg, many see running a business they are passionate about as their ultimate goal," says the Pursuit of Happiness study.

Another survey from Intuit shows that one quarter of millennial-age entrepreneurs have never held a full-time job prior to starting out on their own — nearly three times more than entrepreneurs ages 35-54.

"They want to feel empowerment," explains Rob King, director of small business at e-commerce software firm Intuit Canada. "They don't want to work 9-to-5 and they're not as risk averse as others. Plus technology is moving really fast, so they can do a startup out of their basement," he notes.

Seventy-one per cent run their businesses from a smartphone while one-quarter do so from a tablet, says the survey on the new generation of entrepreneurs.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

> **They don't want to work 9-to-5 and they're not as risk averse as others.**
> Rob King, director of small business, Intuit Canada

Priya Dhillon, a millennial who is part of the leadership team in a multi-unit restaurant business owned by her parents in the GTA, photographed at an A&W in Toronto. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

QUEBEC

Natural gas from yogurt

A town in southern Quebec is changing the way it looks at yogurt.

Saint-Hyacinthe signed an agreement with Yoplait Liberté last week to transform expired and unusable yogurt into natural gas that it says will be able to heat municipal buildings and power a fleet of city-owned vehicles.

Brigitte Massé, the city's communications director, said a total of 6,500 metric tones of yogurt will be transformed over the course of one year into 375,000 cubic metres of natural gas at a city-run biomethanation facility.

Biomethanation is a process through which organic matter and waste is converted into gas after being heated at high temperatures.

"The production of that 6,500 cubic metres of yogurt will allow us to heat our two largest arenas and aquatics centre in Saint-Hyacinthe for a year with natural gas," Massé said Wednesday.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

PLUNGING LOONIE

Startups see a silver lining

Industry watchers say the tumbling loonie is a blessing in disguise when it comes to Canadian startups and the innovation economy as U.S. venture capitalists look to make their investments go further.

As the resource boom that helped fuel Canadian growth over the past decade continues to go bust, Canada's commodity-sensitive currency has lost nearly 40 per cent of its value and now trades at near 13-year lows.

While that spells trouble for snowbirds looking to travel abroad and for shoppers facing higher prices on imported goods, it presents an opportunity for foreign investors, says Steve McCartney, vice-president at Communitech, a Waterloo, Ont., startup incubator.

"In terms of the dollar, Canadian companies would look like they would be an excellent value for them at this point," he said.

The cheap loonie is also an advantage for startups when they're making their pitch, he said, because many of them take in revenue in American dollars but pay operating costs in Canadian currency.

And for young companies looking to compete with established players, the low loonie allows them to compete more aggressively on price, he added.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

FUNDING

American venture capitalists have helped fund some of Canada's biggest recent tech success stories.

- **Hootsuite:** $240 million
- **Kik:** $120 million
- **Shopify:** $110 million

FINANCING

Rates remain at 0.5%

The Bank of Canada is holding its benchmark interest rate at 0.5 per cent even as it downgrades its growth outlook for an economy hit by falling commodity prices.

The central bank made the announcement Wednesday as the country adjusts to what it describes as a complex mix of sliding resource prices, a falling Canadian dollar and weaker business investment.

The bank justified holding the already-low rate because inflation has been unfolding as expected within its ideal target range.

It also pointed to the anticipated economic benefits from Ottawa's commitment to spend on infrastructure. The bank, however, said it did not factor in the potential positive impact of the measures because the details and timing of the investments remain unknown.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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CHANTAL HÉBERT: ON THE POSTMEDIA MELTDOWN

“Canada’s news media is undergoing the biggest journalistic fire sale of its history. It is happening under the nose of a political class that is, for the most part, content to look the other way.

Under the guise of a migration to the digital world, Canada’s news media is undergoing the biggest journalistic fire sale of its history. It is taking place on such a scale that it might be more appropriate to call it a liquidation of information-gathering resources, and it is happening under the nose of a political class that is, for the most part, content to look the other way.

Just last week, some columnists were debating whether Ottawa lacked the gravitas one would normally associate with the capital of a G7 country. Detractors of the city that is home to Parliament will soon be able to add soulless newspapers to the list of its alleged shortcomings.

On Tuesday, Postmedia announced that the main print outlets of four of the country’s major cities — including the nation’s capital — will merge their newsrooms.

In Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and Ottawa, the same journalists will report to both the Postmedia and the Sun papers, with their work to be rewritten by editors to suit the style of each outlet.

For more than 100 years, La Presse was known as the largest French-language daily in North America. Since Jan. 1, it is no longer available in print except on Saturday.

The paper’s owners are gambling that as its readership moves over to its tablet edition, their bottom line will improve. But the jury is out as to what toll, if any, the shift will take on the quality and breadth of the province’s public conversation.

A less informed electorate is more easily manipulated and less engaged.

The parliamentary press gallery is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. Its make-up is a lot more diverse than when I first joined it a few decades ago.

But when it comes to reflecting Canada’s regional diversity, the trend has gone the other way with many regional news organizations leaving the Hill, and with other outlets coming to rely on skeleton crews. In the Star’s Parliament Hill bureau, there are more empty desks than actual bodies these days.

The print media is not the only casualty of this ongoing meltdown.

Mainstream commercial networks are struggling to adapt to digital viewing habits of their audience — leaving less money to devote to their news coverage. After decades of budget cuts, Radio-Canada and the CBC are shadows of their former selves.

So far, the reaction of Canada’s political class has mostly ranged from indifference to public hand-wringing. On Twitter on Tuesday, the mayors of the cities involved in the cuts expressed regrets at the news. So did Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

But there must be a point when the steady disintegration of the country’s fourth estate’s news-gathering and news-getting functions becomes a public-policy issue.

There will be some to actually rejoice in the notion that a shrunk news media will have less potential for digging out embarrassing stories. The corruption inquiry in Quebec and the sponsorship scandal on Parliament Hill both had their source in persistent journalism.

Less short-sighted politicians may consider that they are ignoring this crisis at their own peril. A less informed electorate is more easily manipulated and less engaged. And at a time when parties are toying with notions such as compulsory voting and more participatory democracy, is the decline in political literacy that stands to result from an impoverished information environment a desirable outcome?

On the heels of a three-year study of the Canadian media landscape in 2006, a Senate committee warned that Canada was tolerating a concentration of media ownership that most other countries would find worrisome. And it noted that the consistent depletion of these resources of the country’s public broadcaster compounded the problem.

Some take solace in the notion that Trudeau’s government is committed to reinvesting in the CBC. But a news environment dominated by one media organization — even the public broadcaster — does not amount to a healthy one.

In any event, what followed the Senate report was a decade of laissez-faire that often saw owners sympathetic to the government of the day given free rein over larger media empires, combined with ever-closer-to-the-bone cuts to the CBC.

What we have today is a weaker public broadcaster in a field of journalistic ruins, and Canada’s national fabric is the poorer for it.

Chantal Hébert is a national affairs writer. Her column appears in Metro every Thursday.

THE MICROTREND: Printing your pregnancy

Can’t wait to meet your bundle of joy? Well then — don’t. Some companies have taken 3D ultrasound imaging to the logical next level: they’ve started offering 3D-printed fetus replicas to expectant families. And although the idea is off-putting to some (nine weeks into pregnancy, the printout looks somewhat ... reptilian), it’s proving popular with U.K. parents. The technology had already been used to help blind mums-to-be who can’t view an ultrasound image to “see” their child. But now it’s gaining broad appeal, despite the price tag of around $800 Canadian. A tasteful figurine of just your baby’s face and hands, however, is a mere $360 — and the once-before-a-lifetime moment will never come around again. SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN, PHOTO: WOLFPRINT

ROSEMARY WESTWOOD

metroview

Finding the line between feminist and sensitive snowflake

John Mellish, a 55-year-old P.E.I man, knows his media ropes.

“You’re not live, are you?” he asked when I called. A few radio shock jocks in the central U.S. had gotten to him first. So had about 25 reporters. He hasn’t turned down an interview, because talking to media fits with his plan.

“I guess it’s obvious,” I said. “I’m calling about the sign.”

John and his wife Ursula run a used-car business, Mellish Motors, and the dealership’s roadside sign has a local reputation for witticisms.

Last Christmas, it was a line about not complaining about the holidays, since “We were already fat in August.” “Not everyone shares my sense of humour,” John acknowledged.

Then last week, it held this: “Women are like snowflakes. They can’t drive.”

“It’s stupid but it’s cute” was John’s assessment. (His wife and daughter, he noted, have perfect driving records.)

But Chelsea Ling didn’t laugh. She snapped a photo of the sign and posted it to Facebook with the tag: “Well PEI friends...”

It spread quickly, garnering comments, shares and media coverage that snowballed after the Mellishes posted two more signs: “Sensitive women don’t read this sign” and “Attention drama queens, auditions for today have been cancelled.”

There was also backlash. Someone called John to threaten his life, he told the Toronto Star. On Facebook, Ling said she’s received death and rape threats.

All this controversy is not accidental. The Mellishes and Ling both actively stoked debate — if to different ends. John doesn’t use social media, but he understood as well as Ling its potential power to make private passions public. As a tool, it’s almost a given.

Ling wrote that her goal was to spark discussion about what she saw as unacceptable comments about women.

When Ursula and John followed up about the snowflakes sign, they were expecting personal attacks in order to highlight online negativity. If people were more aware of the consequences, “They might think twice before posting something about a friend or a business owner or a contractor,” John said.

Both sides have been using the media to spread their message — about sexism and what’s funny, and hate and filth on social media. Now, Ling wants to talk with John, “about all of this crazy,” she wrote. Meanwhile, the Mellishes are winding up for more backlash. Yesterday, the sign read: “Sensitive men don’t look at tomorrow’s sign!”

“You can phone back tomorrow,” John offered, “and update on that.”

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"I'm not running away from Vogue. But it will be nice to collaborate. I'm certainly not going into retirement."
GRACE CODDINGTON ON RESIGNING FROM HER NEARLY 30-YEAR TENURE AS CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF VOGUE

Fairey art

Famed street artist Shepard Fairey has left his mark around the world. The book, Covert to Overt, compiles all the Obey founder's work since 2010 — two years after his HOPE piece played a role in Barack Obama's presidential campaign.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Our Fairey City

Toronto was the last stop on Fairey's seven-city mural tour in 2014, with the above mounted at the intersection of Queen Street and Denison Avenue. At the time, Fairey wrote about how much he loved touring the neighbourhood — and the "euphoria" he felt buying a box set of Dead Kennedys singles.

Power and Imperial Glory

In collaboration with printer Jo Watanabe, Fairey drew inspiration from American pop artist Roy Lichtenstein for this pair of large-format prints. The artist has said the latter creation was a comment on the U.S. military industrial complex.

Peace Elephant Mural

This sprawling display decorating the West Hollywood Library was more than 10 times the size of any wall Fairey had painted to that point. Given less than a week to execute the design, Fairey's crew worked 12 to 16 hours per day to complete the work.

Centrefold

Fairey initially blasted his portraits of Fugazi frontman Ian MacKaye and former Black Flag howler Henry Rollins as a massive mural of punk icons in Asbury Park, N.J. The other image, of course, memorializes late Run-D.M.C. DJ Jam Master Jay.

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The productivity experiment

Chris Bailey, pictured here, author of The Productivity Project, writes you may want to cut back on checking email and reaching for that third cup of coffee if you want to be more productive. THE CANADIAN PRESS/CHRIS YOUNG

NEW BOOK

A tale of one man's quest to accomplish more in the day

Is there one sure-fire strategy to maximize your time and energy in a given day?

Chris Bailey was so determined to find out that he turned down two lucrative job offers and devoted a year of his life to a quest for the holy grail of productivity.

In addition to his research and interviews with leading experts, the business school graduate used himself as the test subject in a series of experiments.

Bailey lived in isolation for 10 days, worked 90-hour weeks and gained 10 pounds of muscle mass.

He documented the experiments on his blog and then compiled the upsides and pitfalls of his pursuits in the book The Productivity Project (Random House Canada).

Bailey said there is no one-size-fits-all strategy for increased productivity. He learned that firsthand when the habitually late riser forced himself to wake up at 5:30 a.m. for three months.

"It didn't work for me, and I accomplished less in that experiment than I would have otherwise," Bailey said during a recent interview in Toronto.

"I had to go to bed when I had the most energy, when I was the most productive — because I don't view productivity as how much we produce, I view productivity as how much we accomplish. The best way I found to do that while doing my project was by managing our time, our attention and our energy."

Bailey also tried drinking only water for an entire month and found he had more energy than he had in years.

While he still drinks caffeine and said it can offer productivity benefits, he added that people should be smarter about their consumption habits and not continuously rely on the stimulant.

"Being able to find that energy boost whenever you need it, when you have something important you're working on ... is something huge that you can do."

Bailey writes in his book about the benefits of assessing your Biological Prime Time (BPT) for performing one's highest-impact tasks.

"It's during your peak energy hours that you're able to bring more to whatever it is that you're doing, so that you can spend your energy wisely, in addition to spending your time wisely if you have the flexibility to do so."

A strategy Bailey has maintained is to unplug from digital devices from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. He also suggested shrinking "support tasks" that can consume considerable time, like answering emails.

"If you check them every hour — even for 12 hours — over the course of the day, that's still 12 times a day and more than enough time to keep on top of everything that you have to do."

Bailey said among the best tactics for him were those that allowed him to work "more deliberately and with intention."

"When we have more work to do than the time to do it in, it becomes crucial that we take that step back to figure out what's important," he said.

"When you only work on auto-pilot in response to whatever tasks get sent your way ... other people have control over your work."

Another of his favoured approaches is "the rule of three"— looking ahead to the end of the day to determine which three things you'd like to accomplish.

"On days where you have a ton of meetings, maybe those meetings are what you intend to accomplish — or maybe they limit what you intend to accomplish.

"Just taking that step back is something huge someone can do for their productivity."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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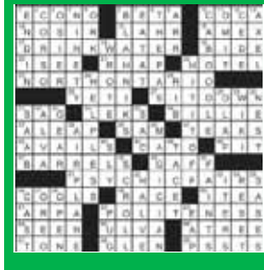

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Author draws on Muslim roots

Khan brings history, poetry, politics to her mystery novel.

MYSTERY

Fully-formed characters offer complex look at culture

Every time mystery writer Ausma Zehanat Khan crosses the border, leaving her adopted home of Denver heading back into Canada for a family visit, she is always aware of her status as a Muslim woman. And whenever she turns on the news, especially during this particularly hostile American election, she is reminded how vitriolic public discussion around the Muslim community can be.

"So much of that discourse is very ill-informed and uneducated on issues about what Muslims are about, what the Muslim faith is about. It's important for me to speak back to that a little bit with my characters and the stories that I'm telling," Khan says.

"I don't really consider it an agenda, but it's my experience that I'm writing about. It's about what I know, the communities that form my reality and the reality of so many people that I know."

Khan, who has her Ph.D. in international human-rights law, specializing in military intervention and war crimes in the Balkans, drew on her expertise and background for her first novel, The Unquiet Dead (Minotaur Books), a mystery-thriller connected to the 1995 Srebrenica genocide. It was here she introduced her protagonist, the Toronto-based Muslim detective Esa Khattak and his partner, Rachel Getty, a no-nonsense hockey-playing cop who plays the perfect foil to elegantly handsome Khattak.

The detectives return for Khan's new murder-mystery, The Language of Secrets, which was inspired by another true crime: the arrest of the Toronto 18, an ill-prepared group of terrorists whose plans to bomb Parliament Hill was thwarted by the RCMP and CSIS in 2006.

To prepare for the book, Khan researched Islamic history and politics, jihadist websites and stacks of police materials. She also had in-house help: her husband is an expert on Islam and politics. "He's a great resource to go to and hear all the different sides of the story," Khan says.

Khan believes her books stand out because there are still few fully formed Muslim characters like Khattak to be found, especially within crime-thrillers. The Language of Secrets is also rare in the genre because of the poetry that flows through it. From recitals of classical works to slam poetry nights, it is present throughout her story, which Khan says comes from her upbringing as the daughter of two Pakistani-Canadians who hosted recitals at their house.

Beyond wanting to celebrate and share Eastern art, Khan had another personal reason for incorporating poetry into a whodunit murder. She says, "If you look at Arab or Persian traditions, you'll see poetry is very much at their heart. I thought a very beautiful way to temper the ugliness of the jihadist ideology is also to express the beauty of those traditions."

Sue Carter is the editor at Quill & Quire magazine.

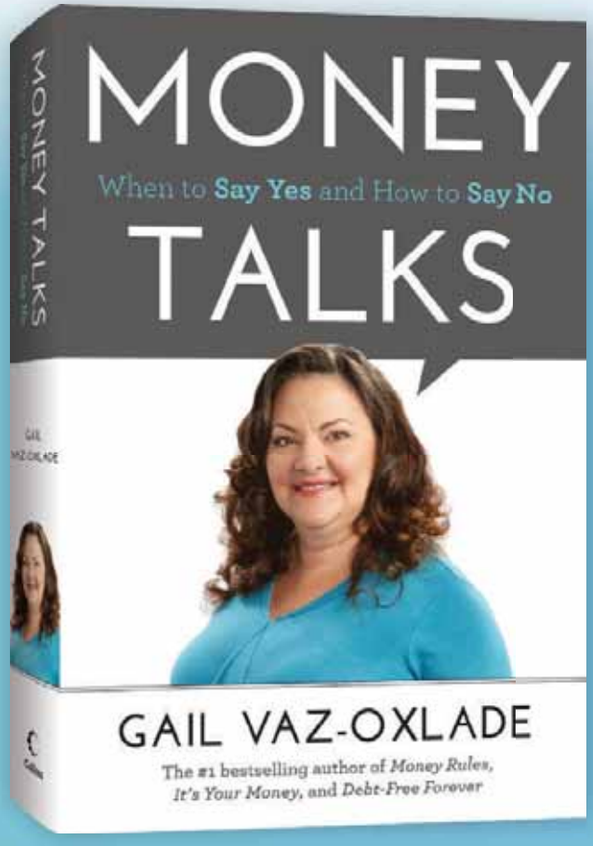
FAIRY TALES

Tale as old as time

Fairy tales are much older than previously thought and are actually thousands of years old, academics found in research published Wednesday.

Analysis indicates that Beauty and the Beast and Rumpelstiltskin are about 4,000 years old while Jack And The Beanstalk can be traced back more than 5,000 years. Anthropologist Jamie Tehrani from Britain's Durham University and folklorist Sara Graca da Silva of New University Lisbon used techniques initially used in biology to study 275 Indo-European stories.

Their findings suggest folk tales existed in oral tradition long before they were put in writing. This backs up a theory put forward by Wilhelm Grimm of the 19th century Brothers Grimm. "Our results support Grimm's view and suggest that a substantial number of tales have existed in Indo-European oral traditions long before they were first written down" Da Silva said. The research appeared in the journal Royal Society Open Science. AFP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Sundance features fearless directors

FILM FESTIVAL

Audiences may be shocked by programming lineup

Shock and awe is coming to the Sundance Film Festival, Robert Redford's annual celebration of indie cinema, which begins Thursday in Park City, Utah.

Movies seeking audience gasps as well as applause include Swiss Army Man, a bromance between a man and a corpse starring Paul Dano and Daniel Radcliffe.

There's also The Lure, a musical about a pair of popstar mermaids who are hungry for love and also human flesh.

And speaking of unusual pairs, there are two films, Christine and Kate Does Christine, one a drama and the other a documentary, that investigate the mysterious 1974 on-air suicide of a Florida TV newscaster.

Then there's Operation Avalanche, by Toronto's Matt Johnson (The Dirties), a conspiracy movie about the Apollo 11 moon landing that threatens to rewrite history and possibly enrage scientists, space freaks and American patriots.

These and other attention grabbers are amongst the 123 features and 72 shorts Sundance will screen from Jan. 21 to 31, many of them world premieres.

Scary movies have long been associated with the Sundance: The Blair Witch Project, Saw, The Babadook and The Witch all earned their first shrieks in Park City.

For the most part, such films have been safely confined to Sundance's Midnight program, which is similar to TIFF's popular Midnight Madness slate. This year it seems they're populating the more mainstream sections, including the dramatic and documentary competitions.

"It's true!" says Sundance festival director John Cooper, in an interview from his L.A. office before leaving for Park City.

"I think this fearlessness is coming from the filmmakers themselves. They're not worrying so much about the end success of their films, because so many of them get picked up to go on a platform that's not even theatrical, more and more. They know that audiences are just going to find them.

"They're just not afraid to take crazy chances. This is what's in their brains and in their hearts and in their passion to tell as a story, and they're doing it without worry."

Witness the "dead guy bromance" that is Swiss Army Man, co-directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, which is debuting in the U.S. Dramatic Competition. Dano plays a suicidal man stranded in the wild who befriends a corpse played by former Harry Potter star Radcliffe. It's one of the weirdest dramas ever to screen at Sundance and Cooper said comparisons to the 1980s comedy Weekend at Bernie's aren't valid.

"To have Daniel Radcliffe play a dead body through a whole movie and make it interesting is just so original. You get caught up in the relationship between Dano and Radcliffe."

Another wild combo is the singing mermaids of The Lure, a film by Poland's Agnieszka Smoczynska that's competing in the World Cinema Dramatic Competition. It stars Marta Mazurek and Michalina Olszańska as mermaid sisters who leave their watery domain to become nightclub singers and also to snack on a few patrons — although trouble begins when love suddenly intrudes.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

The Lure, a movie about flesh-eating mermaids working as nightclub singers, is competing in the World Cinema Dramatic Competition at the Park City, Utah film fest. CONTRIBUTED

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JOHANNA SCHNELLER WHAT I'M WATCHING

Maybe change this show's name to Crybaby Cop

THE SHOW: Shades of Blue, Season 1, Episode 2 (Global/NBC)
THE MOMENT: The Crying

In her boss's bathroom, New York City policewoman Harlee Santos (Jennifer Lopez) talks by phone to her 16-year-old, Christina. Harlee just learned that Christina has snuck off to a nightclub.

"Don't drive with someone who's been drinking," Harlee says. Her eyes fill with tears. Christina can't hear her, but Harlee keeps talking anyway. "Be true to yourself," she says, crying openly now. "Someday you'll have a daughter, and she'll be the best part of your life." She slumps against the sink, overcome.

Okay, Harlee is under pressure. She, her boss Matt (Ray Liotta, scary), and their crew take bribes. The FBI caught her and made her turn rat. Matt is about to give her a polygraph. If this were the first time Harlee wept, we'd understand.

But this is episode two, and already Harlee has wept — copiously — many times. She wept in the opening scene of episode one. She wept at her daughter's school concert. She wept when the FBI caught her. So free and frequent is her weeping, this show should be called Crybaby Cop. Or maybe Shades of Boo-Hoo.

Eyes-filling-with-tears is a handy acting skill, and Lopez is clearly eager to show hers off. She also looks pretty when she cries, unlike, say, me. But given that Harlee is supposed to be a hardened, hard-ass cop, I find her crying off-putting. Did she weep during drills at the academy?

Not since Claire Danes in Homeland has an allegedly professional woman been so easily overcome on the job. Nut up, Harlee.

Weeping on demand for her role in Shades of Blue. CONTRIBUTED

Johanna Schneller is a media connoisseur who zeroes in on pop-culture moments. She appears Monday through Thursday.

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MEET THE CONDO

The Cardinal neighbourhood

Project overview

Aveia, a residential project of 60 townhouses, has been three years in the making, and has just been recently completed in eastern Orléans. The units, built by Boulet Construction, are uniquely designed with third-story lofts and large balconies. Half of the houses back onto Cardinal Creek, making the location as much a selling point as the homes themselves.

Location and transit

The Aveia site is close to Hwy 174 and right off of Old Montreal Road, making it a short trip to the core of Orléans. Place d'Orléans, which offers a wide range of shopping options, is only minutes away, while Trim Park and Ride is also nearby, providing bus routes that take commuters straight downtown.

In the neighbourhood

Cardinal Creek is a rapidly growing residential area. Thus, Aveia homeowners have close proximity to nearby services, and all the benefits of living in Orleans, while still being able to enjoying the parks, trails and wildlife surrounding Cardinal Creek.

Housing Amenities

The townhouses, designed by Barry Hobin, are finished with brick and vinyl facades and a garage entrance opening onto the balcony. The ground floor includes nine-foot ceilings, giving the rooms a spacious, sophisticated feel. The homes are outfitted with hard-wood and granite flooring and a walk-out basement. ILANA REIMER/FOR METRO

NEED TO KNOW

What: Aveia at Cardinal Creek
Builder: Boulet Construction
Designer: Barry Hobin
Location: Aveia Private, Orléans
Building: Residential townhouses
Sizes: From 2,116 sq. ft to 2,195 sq. ft.
Pricing: Starting at $369,900
Model: Two bedrooms, three bathrooms, basement, loft and garage
Status: Complete
Occupancy: Anytime
Sales centre: 27 Aveia Pr. Orléans
Phone: 613-834-8828
Website: bouletconstruction.com

CONTRIBUTED

RESOLUTIONS

Four tips for getting your home organized this year

There's a reason you haven't started that "get organized" New Year's resolution yet, and the reason is simple: It's an overwhelming chore.

Well, for most of us at least. You see, some people not only enjoy finding order in the chaos, but they enjoy it so much they've made it into a career. Before you forget all about your 2016 pledge, we hit up some professional organizers for their top tips.

1 Start small

If you resolved to learn to cook this year, you wouldn't start with hosting a six-course dinner party. Likewise, you don't want to kick off your organizing plan with a garage overhaul. "The junk drawer is the perfect starter project because it's a microcosm of your entire home," says New York-based organizer Jeni Aron, owner of Clutter Cowgirl. "You can sort your junk drawer in a half-hour to an hour. And then you can move on to a bigger challenge with confidence."

2 Get a handle on paperwork

You know those papers on your coffee table? Well, more are coming in tomorrow's mail. The good news? It's fairly simple to get a handle on. "A quick solution is to gather all your current papers in one place and divide everything into three piles: To Do, To Read and To File," advises Debbie Lillard, author of A Mom's Guide to Home Organization. "If unopened mail is included in that pile of paperwork, open it and discard envelopes and excess materials. Then tackle one pile at a time until you are caught up. Just having it all in one place will make you feel more in control."

Getting matching hangers creates visual order. ISTOCK

3 Confront the closet

More than any other space, closets are prone to becoming cluttered, daunting pits. "If you haven't worn something in a year, you probably won't wear it again," says New York-based organizer Aly Finkelstein, of Organized by Aly. "Scan your closet and then bag all of your unwanted clothes for either resale or, preferably, donation." While you're in there, she says to replace those warped, mismatched, clothes-snagging hangers — it's the new year, after all.

4 Think digital

Organizing isn't limited to your physical space these days. You know all of those pictures floating around in your email and text messages? Rescue them before they float away into the digital ether. "Organizing last year's digital photos is the type of project you can accomplish in an afternoon," says Philadelphia-area professional organizer Crystal Sabalaske, owner of Cluttershrink. "Search by year, select those you want to print and then file everything away in dated folders." Next up? The owner's manuals to your electronics. Sabalaske suggests rounding them up, deciding which ones are important to keep then filing away by room.

MONICA WEYMOUTH/FOR METRO IN NEW YORK

"I think it poses an existential threat to the very fabric of what sports is about": Andre Agassi on the alleged match-fixing scandal in tennis

Nguyen finding his resolve

FIGURE SKATING

Teen inspired by his dad — a Vietnamese refugee

It hasn't been an easy season for Nam Nguyen.

He's going through another growth spurt that has thrown his skating slightly off-kilter. He's feeling the pressure of defending his Canadian title against a field that once again includes Patrick Chan. There have been days, the 17-year-old says, where he's wanted to quit.

But Nguyen draws on resilience learned from his father Sony, who was among the hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese refugees who fled by boat to escape the country's Communist tyranny in the 1970s and '80s.

"He's so brave," Nguyen said of his dad. "I'm very happy that he's my father. He's taught me to become very strong.

"Sometimes he'll compare my problems to his problems and that will make my problems look like nothing," he added, laughing.

Sony Nguyen made the harrowing 500-kilometre trek to Malaysia in 1987, one of 149 people stuffed into a boat just 10 metres long. There was no room to walk. They sat, legs stacked upon one another like kindling, holding on while the rough South China Sea knocked them about.

They were attacked by pirates who took their food, water and belongings and what little money they had. The pirates raped several of the female passengers before leaving them adrift with nothing.

They were eventually rescued by a passing freighter, and taken to the Pulao Bidong refugee camp in Malaysia.

"At that time I said, 'Yes, we are alive,'" Sony said. "When I escaped my country, we had to realize we leave or we could die. It was very frightening ... right up until I put my foot down in Malaysia."

Sony lived in the refugee camp for nearly a year before a Canadian sponsored him to move to Ottawa. Nguyen would send for Nam's mom Thu, a doctor in Vietnam, a year later.

"It was very difficult," said Nguyen, a computer scientist in Toronto. "Life, it's not easy, but we have to stand up and move on and fight for it. And that's what Nam has been trained for."

Nam and his dad were gripped by recent images of Syrian refugees, and their own harrowing escapes. Because Toronto's Jewish community came to the aid of the Vietnamese years ago, Nam recently spoke at the Holy Blossom Temple to ask the two communities to work together to support Syrian refugees.

"I feel really, really sorry for those people," Sony said. "They have been through what I went through, they sacrificed their families and their lives to come to Canada.... I told Nam, 'That's what dad has been through.' Nam is very proud of the family."

> **He's taught me to become very strong.**
> Nam Nguyen on his father, Sony

Sony enrolled Nam in hockey at the age of four. The two are big Vancouver Canucks fans. He started figure skating at five, and quit hockey at eight when he won the Canadian juvenile figure skating title.

Nam has captured a national title at every age group and won the world junior championships in 2014.

He was fifth at the world senior championships last spring.

He's the defending champion this week at the Canadian figure skating championships in Halifax. Sitting in a lounge at the Toronto Cricket, Skating and Curling Club after a recent practice, Nam said his season has been a tough one.

One issue is his growth. He recently grew about six inches in a year, and figures he's grown another four since last spring.

"You go from a young man to a man and it's not so much the height, but your shoulders get broader ... just a different kind of weight," said his coach Brian Orser. "It's always an adjustment. But when he gets through this (growth spurt), it's full steam ahead."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Nam Nguyen
KEVIN LEE/GETTY IMAGES

IN BRIEF

Bouchard 'OK' in Australian Open exit

Eugenie Bouchard admitted her heart was pounding during an Australian Open second-round defeat against fourth seed Agnieszka Radwanska.

But the 21-year-old from Westmount, Que., took that as a good sign as she lost 6-4, 6-2 Wednesday in what she called "the biggest match I've played in a while against the toughest opponent by far since my comeback from injury."

"It was my toughest test; I did OK," Bouchard said of the 90-minute contest.

The Canadian is coming back from a concussion suffered in a fall in the locker-room at the U.S. Open last year. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Knicks valued as top NBA club at $3B

The New York Knicks are worth $3 billion, highest in the NBA, according to Forbes.

Forbes said Wednesday in its annual ranking of franchise valuations that the Knicks regained the top spot from the Los Angeles Lakers thanks to a 20 per cent value increase from 2015, which was driven by a new cable deal and the highest premium-seating revenue in the league.

The Lakers have a value of $2.7 billion. The Chicago Bulls, Boston Celtics and Los Angeles Clippers rounded out the top five.

The Toronto Raptors are 14th at $980 million.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

UFC

CM Punk one step closer to securing opponent for debut

No stranger to calling out opponents from his days in the WWE, Phil (CM Punk) Brooks watched with interest as novice MMA fighter Mickey Gall pointed the finger at him.

Brooks, who has been in training for his UFC debut since signing with the promotion in December 2014, says Gall was smart to call him out at a regional show in November with UFC president Dana White in the audience.

"I'm an unknown and everybody kind of wants to cash in that Powerball ticket," Brooks said. "I'm like a human sexy trophy that everybody wants to win. So yeah, I think it's a wise decision by him. He had Dana front row for it, so he had the right audience and it's gotten him this far. So bully for him."

Gall's move was captured on video on White's "Lookin' for a Fight" web series.

"Hey Dana White, I don't know if CM Punk has an opponent, but I would love to fight that man CM Punk," Gall said in the cage after winning his pro debut.

White subsequently signed the 23-year-old welterweight, matching him against Mike Jackson (0-0) on the undercard of UFC 196 in Las Vegas. Should Gall (1-0) win Feb. 6, he will get his fight with the former pro wrestler.

Brooks is happy to move one step closer to an opponent.

"It gives you more purpose in everything you do every day and you focus in on something. So it helps," he said.

> **I'm super-anxious to get going.**
> Phil Brooks

The 37-year-old Brooks, a Chicago native, has been honing his MMA skills in Milwaukee under trainer Duke Roufus.

Brooks had his training derailed for two months in the fall by a shoulder injury, but he says he feels "100 per cent stronger" than he was a year ago — "in all aspects." THE CANADIAN PRESS

RECIPE Roasted Chicken and Chickpea Tray Bake

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

The cool yogurt topping is the perfect complement to this Moroccan-spiced chicken tray bake.

Ready in
Prep time: 10 minutes
Total time: 35 minutes
Serves 4

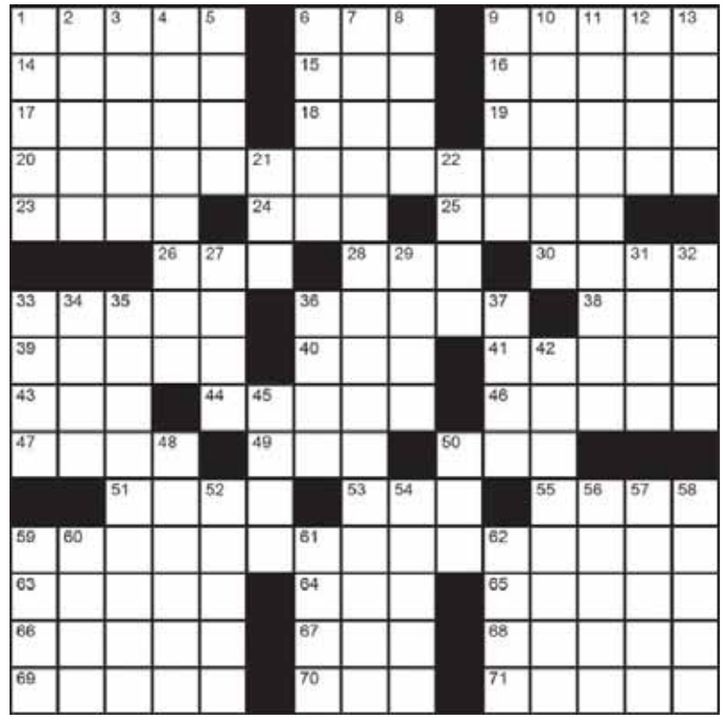
Ingredients
- 5 Tbsp olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic, minced finely
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp cumin
- 2 tsp salt
- Pinch pepper
- Pinch of red pepper flakes
- 1 cup Greek yogurt
- 6 boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 2 cups cherry tomatoes
- 15 ounce can chickpeas, rinsed
- 1 cup cilantro

Directions
1. Preheat oven to 450 F.
2. Whisk oil, garlic and spices together. Take 1 Tbsp of the mixture, stir it into the yogurt.
3. In a large bowl, toss the chicken, tomatoes, chickpeas and cilantro with the rest of the oil and spice mixture. Arrange in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet.
4. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes.
5. Serve with a dollop of the spiced yogurt.

FOR MORE MEAL IDEAS, VISIT SWEETPOTATOCHRONICLES.COM

CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. "Just Between You _ _" by April Wine
6. PIN-inputing spot
9. Sounded satisfied
14. "Rio" band, when doubled
15. Alphabetic trio
16. Stock
17. "Give _ _ _." (Try)
18. Marci of "Canada AM" on CTV
19. Hagar the Horrible's wife
20. 1885 + Louis Riel + North-West Rebellion + Regina Courthouse = What?: 3 wds.
23. "Saturday Night Live" alum Horatio
24. 'Legal' suffix
25. Poet's 'previously'
26. "Am _ _ brother's keeper?"
28. Female pronoun
30. Snake-looking fishies
33. "Dave" (1993) star Kevin
36. In the least: 2 wds.
38. Theatre seating area
39. More pleasant
40. Li'l loudness
41. Classy theatrical show
43. White House nickname
44. Small boat
46. Elated
47. Dick Tracy's beloved
49. School of thought
50. Fail to keep
51. Leafy veggie
53. Positive vote
55. Faucets
59. Montreal's cruciform office/shopping complex since 1962: 3 mots
63. Outlandish
64. Gladiator's lucky number
65. "Don't Look Back in _": 1996 Oasis hit
66. War horse
67. Morn's follower
68. Keen
69. Cattle groups
70. Born, in society bios
71. Geological flattops

DOWN
1. Mine entrances
2. _Sweet (Sugar substitute)
3. Run out
4. Chatelaine or Maclean's
5. Organic compound
6. Currency exchange fees
7. Sloan song that goes "I know that I'll be living it in Canada.": 5 wds.
8. Royal Canadian _
9. Biblical son of Jacob and Zilpah
10. Relaxed: 2 wds.
11. Like the cowboy's gun before the draw at sundown
12. Consequently
13. Jan & _
21. Tina of "30 Rock"
22. Careen
27. French 'seas'
29. Fifty percent
31. God
32. Go to and fro
33. Do needlework
34. Similar
35. Canadian athlete Patrick Chan's profession: 2 wds.
36. Hertz rival
37. "Hard Core _" (1996)
42. Next to nothing payment
45. Capital of the Ukraine
48. Hallowed
50. Ms. Dawn Chong
52. The Who album: 'Live at _'
54. Aristocracy
56. 100-eyed giant of ancient Greek mythology
57. Michelangelo masterpiece
58. Ecological stages
59. Upscale
60. Minstrel's pear-shaped instrument
61. Men Without Hats lead singer Mr. Doroschuk
62. Lady's address

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS by Sally Brompton

Aries March 21 - April 20
Even if you find it hard to connect emotionally you will do so with ease over the next few days. The planets will help you empathize with those who you might otherwise find it hard to feel sorry for.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
Taking a light-hearted approach will make it easier to deal with the huge responsibilities coming your way. Don't take what you have to do too seriously — just get on with it.

Gemini May 22 - June 21
You can feel that something special is going to happen. The Sun in Aquarius will bring new opportunities your way, and give you the confidence to make something of them.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
How can you make your home life more enjoyable? Put work matters to the back of your mind and focus on family to the exclusion of everything else. Making a profit is okay but making loved ones happy is priceless.

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
No matter how busy the past few weeks have been and no matter how desperately you need time to recover this is going to be an active day. Keep the momentum going.

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Do not to make any sudden changes. If you do you will only have to change them back again later on. Things may look bad but they are not nearly as bad as they seem.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
You will be rather excitable today and the smallest thing will set you off. Don't be surprised if others, even those you are closest to emotionally, stay out of your way.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
Don't panic. Your life is NOT falling apart — you are just looking at things from too negative an angle. You may be down but later on your mood and your viewpoint will be more positive.

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Friends will surprise and delight you with sudden invitations and suggestions for having a good time, so don't plan your schedule in too much detail. You must be ready to drop whatever you are doing and party.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
Impress employers and important people today. You have the knack of knowing the right thing to say, in the right way at the right time, and it won't be long before others are trying to impress you.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
You must keep dreaming, even if so many of your dreams have failed to come true. There is every chance that what earlier seemed like a fantasy will quickly become a reality.

Pisces Feb. 20 - March 20
You could be too emotional today. Resist the urge to reply in kind to any adverse comments you receive. Count to ten before putting your feelings into words.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

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	2	8	7				6	3
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